

Florida Republican continues fight for fiscal responsibility and free trade

By Kevin Derby, Sunshine State News

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While the new Congress has only been in session for little more than a week, Florida Republican U.S. Rep. Vern Buchanan is off to a fast start.

First elected to Congress in 2006, Buchanan, who represents all of DeSoto, Hardee and Sarasota counties as well as parts of Charlotte and Manatee counties, has been at center stage pushing one of the core issues of the new Republican majority -- a constitutional amendment to balance the federal budget. Just as he had in 2007 when he first took his seat, Buchanan opened the session by introducing the balanced budget amendment.

Buchanan stressed the importance of the amendment, especially as the national debt reached \$14 trillion -- which breaks down to almost \$45,000 for every American.

"Wasteful spending is threatening our future and will unfairly burden our children and grandchildren with debt that is not their own," said Buchanan when he introduced the measure, which would balance the budget by 2016. "A constitutional amendment will force Congress to make the tough choices necessary to balance the budget for taxpayers today and for future generations."

Buchanan joined colleagues in calling for a reduction in federal spending.

"We don't have a revenue problem," said the congressman. "We have a spending problem. Each year, billions of taxpayer dollars are spent on waste, fraud and abuse. A balanced budget

amendment would force lawmakers to take a hard look at the programs they are funding and hold federal agencies accountable.”

Buchanan pointed to state and local governments as proof that his proposal, which can be changed in time of war or national emergency, can be implemented.

“Forty-nine out of 50 states, including Florida, have balanced budget requirements,” said Buchanan. “Cities, counties and states all routinely balance their budgets and so should the federal government. A balanced budget amendment is a common-sense measure that will save taxpayer dollars and help ensure financial security of our kids and our kid’s kids.”

In an attempt to cut spending -- and show how serious he is about the balanced budget -- Buchanan introduced a bill freezing congressional pay raises until the amendment is passed.

“Congress should not get a pay raise until it shows the discipline necessary to balance the budget,” said Buchanan. “Every family in America has to live within its means, why should the federal government be any different? Until Congress gets spending under control it doesn’t deserve a salary hike.”

Buchanan’s proposed amendment is getting attention at the state and national levels -- something that may come in handy if he decides to run against Democratic U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson in 2012. Other possible Republican candidates include former U.S. Sen. George LeMieux, U.S. Rep. Connie Mack, U.S. Rep. Tom Rooney who is also raising his profile, U.S. Rep. Dan Webster, Senate President Mike Haridopolos, former House Majority Leader Adam Hasner, and businessman and retired Army officer Mike McCalister.

State CFO Jeff Atwater praised Buchanan’s proposed amendment.

“Just as families across Florida and the nation work to balance their checkbooks each month, the federal government must work to balance the nation’s budget,” said Atwater on Monday. “The people of Florida spoke clearly and loudly on Election Day when they overwhelmingly, by a 72 percent margin, supported balancing the federal budget without raising taxes.

"I applaud Representative Buchanan for his efforts to pursue and promote accountability and further transparency in the federal budget process, and support him wholeheartedly," added Atwater.

Pass the BBA, a group led by former Ohio Secretary of State Ken Blackwell and vice chaired by Hasner, also praised Buchanan's proposal as well as similar measures introduced by U.S. Rep. Bob Goodlatte, R-Va., and U.S. Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah.

"As most people in Washington celebrated the swearing-in of a new Congress, Reps. Bob Goodlatte and Vern Buchanan were already hard at work, introducing balanced budget amendment bills," said Blackwell. "We are grateful they have taken leadership roles on this issue and we look forward to helping them in the fight to bring fiscal sanity to Washington.

"With their leadership on this issue in the House and Senator Lee's efforts in the Senate, the American people will finally get the change they voted for," added Blackwell. "We have a challenging fight ahead of us, and we know the big-spending interests will fight this tooth and nail, but we have confidence that the voters who demanded an end to 'business-as-usual' continue to make their voices heard."

Besides pushing the amendment, Buchanan, the only Floridian serving on the powerful U.S. House Ways and Means Committee, also received a new assignment that could have an impact on trade and economic development in his district. U.S. Rep. Dave Camp, R-Mich., named Buchanan to the Trade and Oversight subcommittees under the umbrella of the full Ways and Means Committee.

"I am honored by the opportunity to serve on such important subcommittees," said Buchanan. "Through these subcommittees I will work to ensure that Southwest Florida's needs are addressed.

Buchanan vowed in his new position to fight for free trade agreements, maintaining that these measures would lead to new jobs in the Sunshine State.

“Jobs and the economy are the most important issue,” said Buchanan. “If we can grow our exports, it will help Florida’s economy as we send our goods, services and products to people around the world. In turn, this will help generate new jobs, and lead to an economic revitalization.

“For starters, the Congress can ratify the pending free-trade agreements with Panama, South Korea, and Columbia,” added Buchanan, who is chairman of the Friends of Panama Caucus. “I support these agreements, and will urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join me in moving these trade agreements forward.”

Buchanan added that his new position on the Trade Subcommittee will help his efforts to improve Port Manatee, the closest port to the Panama Canal, before the Panama Canal expansion is complete in 2014 or 2015.

<http://www.sunshinestatenews.com/story/vern-buchanan-pushing-balanced-budget-amendment>